



ADAMS COUNTY AGRIBUSINESS

WORKFORCE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

ADAMS ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

JUNE 2023



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INTRODUCTION

It is the mission of the Adams Economic Alliance to develop and implement creative community-based strategies to enhance economic opportunity and foster a dynamic framework for balanced growth and development through the Adams County Economic Development Corporation, the Adams County Industrial Development Authority, and the Adams County General Authority.

The partners comprising Adams Economic Alliance provide strategic solutions aimed at creating and retaining jobs and contributing to a stable tax base to support our local economy.

AGRICULTURE IN ADAMS

Agriculture Industry Rooted in Adams County Way of Life

Adams County has a long rich history of producing bountiful crops and being stewards of the land for generations. Between 1905 and 1925, Adams County became Pennsylvania's first-ranked county in apple production. Shifts in the industry in the mid-twentieth century include changing varieties and processing uses; greater specialization on farms; increased activity of the state land-grant apparatus in the industry; and the use of migrant labor (Adams County Fruit Belt, C. 1875-1960, n.d.).

The Adams County fruit belt developed in the late nineteenth century, aided by new transportation routes, local innovation, and a plague of pests that wiped out many trees across the state, creating a competitive opportunity for growers who were willing to spray their crops. The Adams County Fruit Belt encompasses a 4-to-6-mile region extending along the east slope of South Mountain. Geographically, the fruit belt extends from the northern to the western townships in Adams County. It forms a "C" shape beginning in Latimore Township and extends southwestward to Hamiltonban. Included are the small villages of York Springs, Bendersville, Biglerville, Arendtsville, and Fairfield (Adams County Fruit Belt, C. 1875-1960, n.d.).

The Adams County fruit belt is estimated to contribute \$580 million to the County's economy. The fruit belt is home to more than 120 fruit farms with 20,000 acres planted in orchards ("Economic Impact Model for the Historic South Mountain Fruit Belt in Adams County Pennsylvania," 2017). Most of those acres are planted in apple orchards but the County also produces peaches, cherries and a variety of other fruits and vegetables. Adams County is the largest producer of apples and peaches in Pennsylvania and the sixth largest producer in the nation.

Adams County is an ideal location for food processors and manufacturers with proximity to the fruit belt. Some of the county's largest employers such as Knouse Foods Cooperative Inc., Mott's LLP, and Rice Fruit Company are located within the fruit belt. Many of the other food processors and manufacturers such as Plainville Farms, Winter Gardens and G&S Foods call Adams County home because of our proximity to Hanover, PA, known as the snack food capital of the world. Plastics and paper products have a high location quotient related to packing and shipping goods. Value added products, in the form of wine and hard cider are gaining in popularity and have provided the opportunity for Adams to become the "Hard Cider Capital of Pennsylvania" (*Adams County Fruit Belt, C. 1875-1960, n.d.*).

Regional Agricultural Impact

Like the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, agriculture has been a staple of the South Central regional economy for centuries. In fact, agriculture supports one out of every ten jobs in Pennsylvania. As of 2021, the region follows the state's trend with top industries related to production and processing of crops, animals, and forestry products, as well as food manufacturing. State-wide, in 2019, these sectors represent a total economic impact of \$132.5 billion. The Pennsylvania agriculture industry supports a total of 593,600 jobs, both directly and indirectly to the industry (COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY, n.d.).



Alliance Ag Connection

As Adams County's Certified Economic Development Organization, our organization has supported the industry through financing fruit trees, equipment purchases, construction projects and purchases of family farmsteads. In fact, changes within the state's financing programs were a direct result of the Corporation's advocacy efforts. Our organization understands the importance of Agriculture to our local economy. The Adams Economic Alliance (Alliance) is an advocate and partner in preserving and growing Agribusiness in Adams County. Currently, more than 34,000 acres are preserved to remain in agriculture, and this will ensure that Agriculture remains a leading industry in the Adams County economy. As our mission states, we promote balanced growth and development of our Agriculture Industry.

Workforce: An Economic Development Issue

Access to a skilled workforce is key to any business' long-term success. COVID-19 highlighted the issue and changed the way many businesses identify expansion opportunities. Many people left the workforce during the pandemic and many more are approaching retirement in the next few years. Adams County has 38,435 people approaching retirement age according to local workforce investment board data (SCPa Works, 2023). These challenges are felt across all industries and sectors. That is why the Adams Economic Alliance is committed to being a partner in developing a skilled talent pipeline for Adams County businesses in Agriculture and other industries.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Adams Economic Alliance, The Center for Youth & Community Development, and Allegro Learning Solutions collaborated to conduct a workforce needs assessment of community stakeholders to include agricultural workers, farmers, business owners, and migrant seasonal farm worker families. This project was funded through SCPa Works, the Southcentral Workforce Investment Board. SCPa Works identified a need to gather baseline data and insights from Adams County Agricultural industry stakeholders with the goal of identifying workforce development needs and thus the tools to best support the community.

The project team collaborated and leveraged our different areas of expertise to develop a well-rounded Workforce needs Assessment. The Center for Youth & Community Development provided expertise in engaging Latino agricultural workers, youth and human services organizations dedicated to serving Adams County. Allegro Learning Solutions provided expertise as a workforce training education provider. Adams Economic Alliance will: conduct outreach to business leaders, executives, and decision makers in the Adams County agriculture industry; assess the agribusiness workforce need; gain understanding of the workforce challenges facing agriculture leaders; learn of past programs and investment or practices agribusinesses use to upskill employees; assess agribusiness' desire to upskill and invest in training opportunities for incumbent workers.

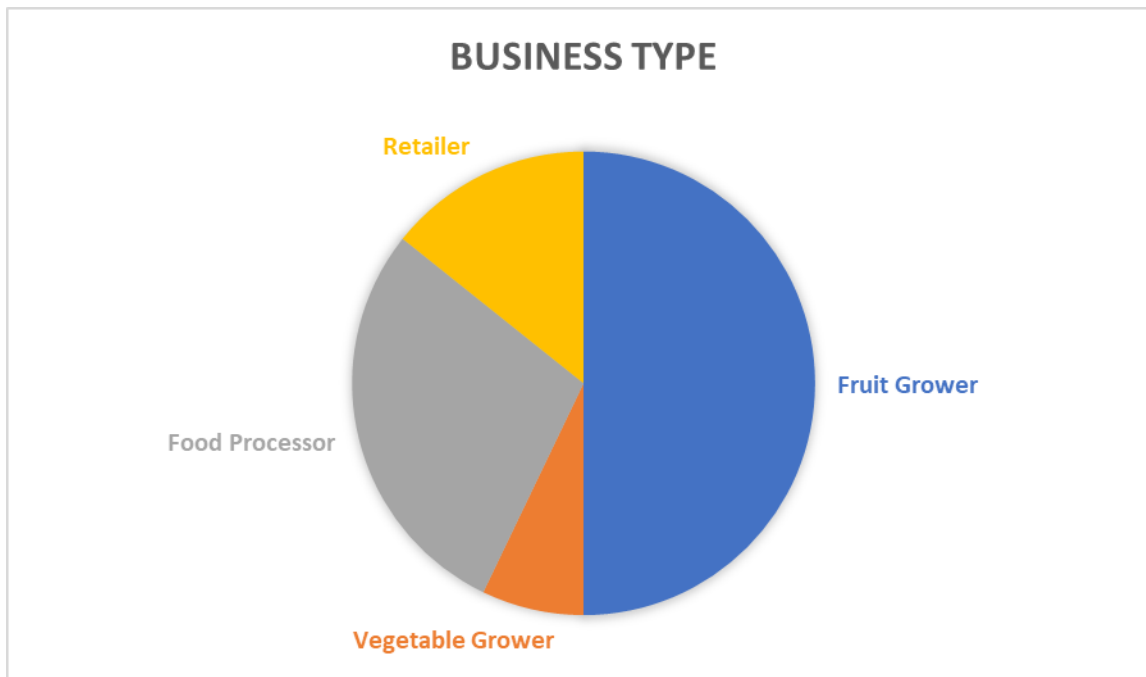
Data Collection Methods

The Adams Economic Alliance used a mixed research methods approach to collecting information from the Agribusiness community. The Alliance developed a questionnaire using Survey Monkey (Appendix 1). The Alliance used non-directive or unstructured interviewing to engage business owners, HR professionals and industry experts. A series of focus groups were conducted to elicit feedback and discussion. A single community forum was conducted engaging business owners, human services professionals, and community members. The Alliance also used secondary research methods to contribute to this report.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

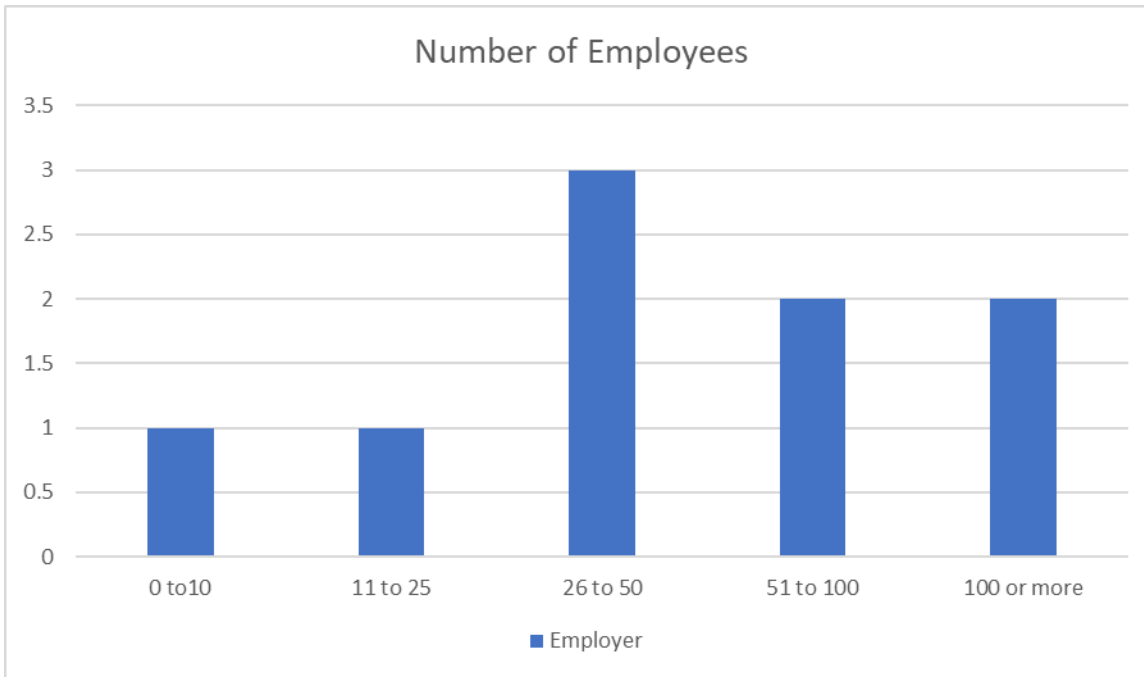
The Adams Economic Alliance team developed the 9-question electronic survey (Appendix 1) in collaboration with Allegro Learning Solutions and The Center for Youth & Community Development. The target audience for this survey was business owners and human resource managers actively involved in the Adams County Agriculture Industry. The research team specifically targeted fruit growers and food processors that predominantly hire Hispanic and Latino community members in Adams County. The Adams Economic Alliance collected the survey information and identified a need to follow up survey responses with interviews and focus groups to better serve our community through this Workforce Needs Assessment.

The Adams Economic Alliance received survey responses from 4 large food processing employers in Adams County. Nearly half of the survey responses were collected from fruit growers in the Northern and Western regions of the county known as the South Mountain Fruit Belt. Two respondents have retail locations in Adams County. The responses received from the various agribusinesses highlighted the diversity of agriculture in Adams County. Other types of industry classifications include dairy, beef, equine, poultry, swine, grain, and many food manufacturers that could be included in further studies to better represent Adams County agriculture in its entirety.



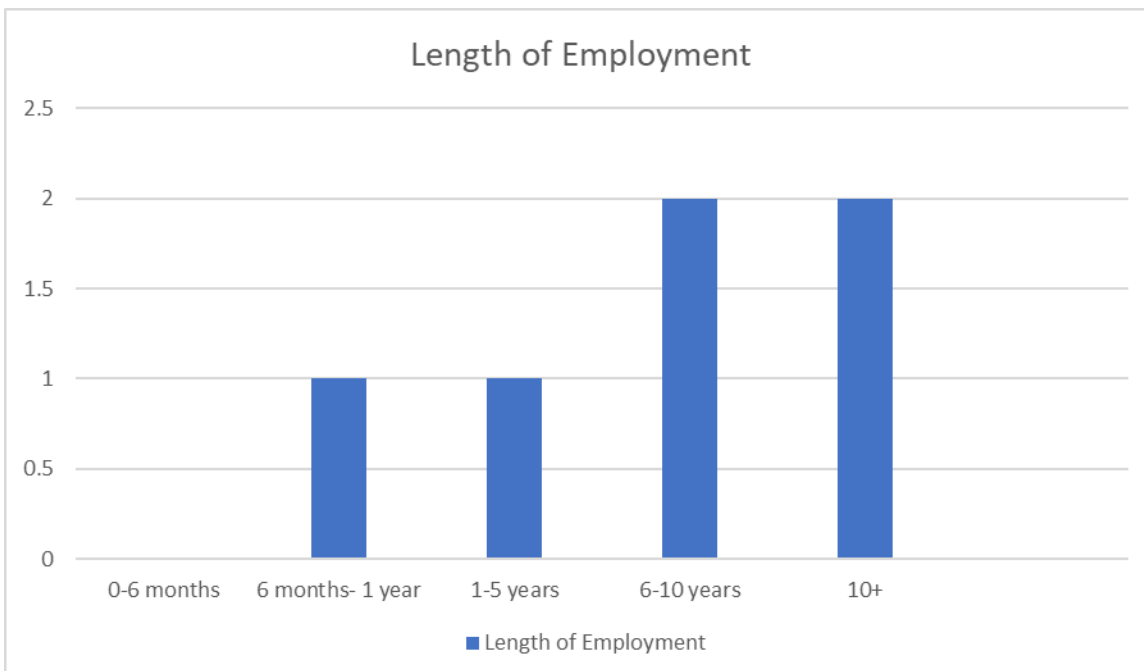
(Figure 1)

The survey received responses from agribusinesses of various sizes. Fruit growers and farming operations in Adams County often employ large numbers of seasonal workers from March through November. Most of these positions are filled by foreign-born people from Mexico and countries in Central America (USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture). It is important to note that Adams County is home to other foreign-born minorities. During an interview with a large food processor, the HR Manager noted, “We have a significant number of Haitian employees that live in both Franklin and Adams Counties.” Many growers have a handful of full-time year-round employees. In the survey, we asked businesses, “How many employees are employed during peak season?” See Figure 2.



(Figure 2)

Traditionally, Adams County was home to a large migrant population that would follow harvest seasons up and down the East Coast. Recent national trends from the USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture show people are becoming more settled and less likely to follow harvest from state to state (*USDA ERS - Farm Labor, 2023*) In the USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture, 85 percent of crop farmworkers are not migrant which is more than a 40 percent increase from 1996-1998. This trend was noted during many of the focus groups and individual interviews. A fruit grower in Biglerville said, “We only employ one group of people that travel from Florida year after year that fit a migrant worker definition. It really makes up a small percentage of our workforce.” Another Fruit Grower in York Springs, said, “Our operation is totally reliant upon the H2A program.” During an interview one business owner said, “Most of my workers are seasonal, but they come back year after year and some of my employees have been with me for 10-20 years.”



(Figure 3)

Many of the traditional migrant families settled in Adams County and the next generations are now growing up in the community and attending school. Some of the families have been settled in Adams County for two or three generations. During the interview process we asked business owners if they see farmworkers' children pursuing careers in the agriculture industry. The responses were overwhelmingly one sided. The percentage of second and third generation Hispanics and Latinos that pursue a career in Agriculture are very low. One fruit grower said, "The children get a great education here and are bilingual. They have so many career options that the farm isn't attractive." Another fruit grower stated, "Our workers want a better life for their children. They know how physically demanding farm labor is that they encourage their children to go to college or enter another field."

Attracting young talent is a challenge in every industry, but it has proved especially difficult for the agriculture industry in Adams County. The median age of residents of South-Central Pennsylvania is higher than the state average with most residents falling in the 50-59 age range (*Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*, 2023) Adams county residents follow this regional trend with 38,435 residents approaching retirement age in the next 10 years (Figure 4) (SCPa Works, 2023) "The number of young, recent immigrants working in agriculture has also fallen, and as a result the farm workforce is aging." (*USDA ERS - Farm Labor*, 2023)



(Figure 4)

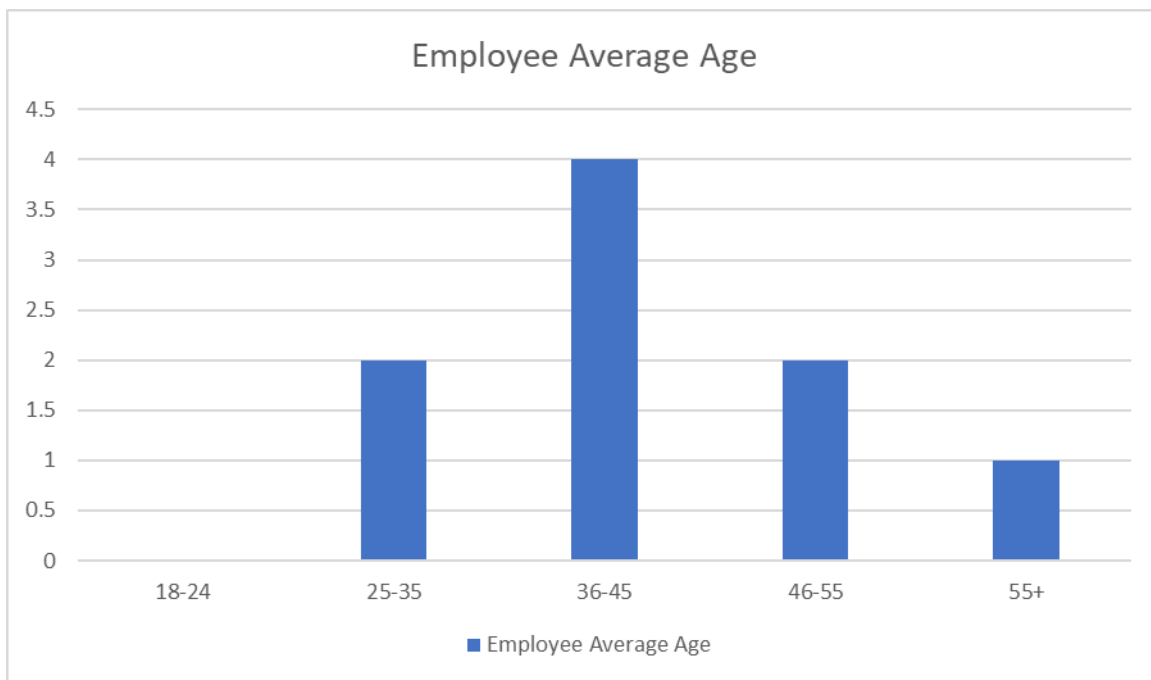
The survey asked, "What is the average age of your workforce?" Most respondents selected 36-45 age range. Some businesses have an average age above 46 and are at high risk of losing their experienced workforce to retirement (Figure 5.) A fruit grower in Aspers PA pondered, "The Adams County Fruit Belt is facing a large transition in the coming years. An aging workforce is a concern, but our community has 1000's of acres owned by people in their 70's and 80's and many of our children have left the family farm. Will the next generation farm or will it be sold for more housing development?"

The aging workforce and the need for skilled young talent is increasing but Shawn Eckenrode, Director of Adams County Technical Institute, sees a potential solution with increased support for Career and Technical Education. Adams County Technical Institute (ACTI) started in 2020 and currently offers 8 programs to students from five of the six public schools in Adams County. Biglerville High School

sends their students to Cumberland Perry Vo Tech. Shawn Eckenrode explained, “The surrounding counties offer 20 to 30 programs to their students. ACTI is one of the smallest Tech Ed programs in the state.” The interest in ACTI and the opportunity to learn a trade is desired by students in Adams County. ACTI again received more applications from Adams County High School students than there are available seats. Shawn Eckenrode said, “We turned away nearly 60 students because we don’t have the space.”

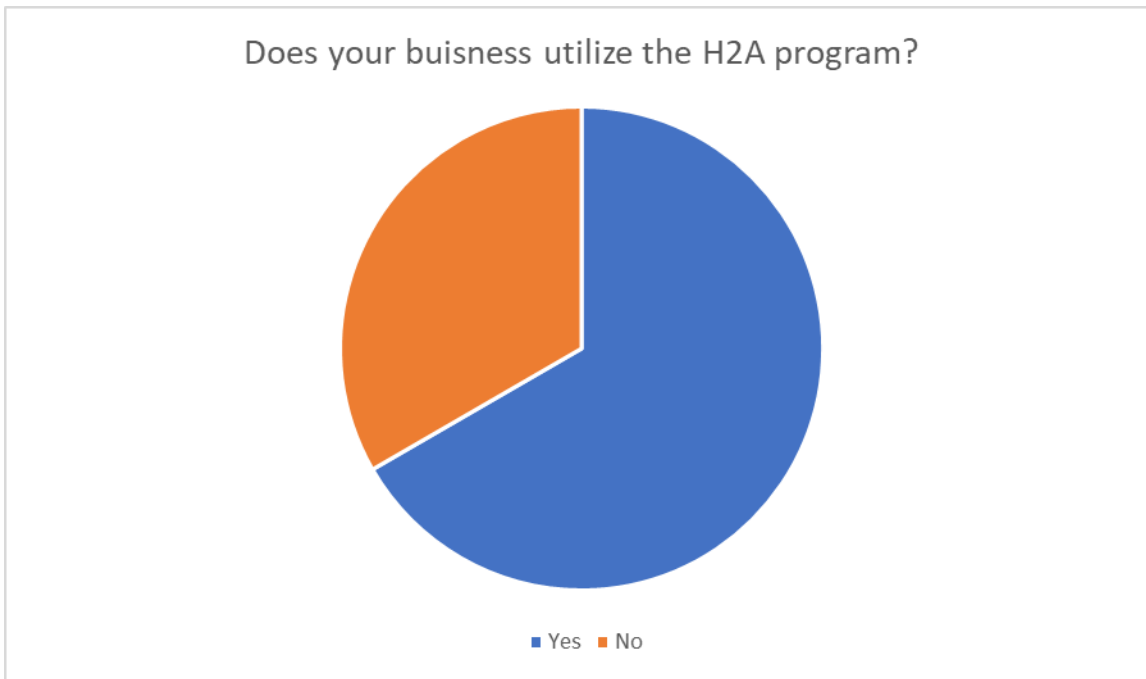
The students in Adams County are at a disadvantage because of the lack of technical education programs available to them. The only program currently offered by ACTI that is considered Ag related is the diesel tech program which is full for the 2023-24 school year. Shawn Eckenrode acknowledges, “We are aware of the need for youth in Agriculture related fields and there is interest from the students in Adams County.” The problem is that ACTI cannot expand at their current location and is currently looking to purchase land for a new larger facility for ACTI. Each year ACTI conducts surveys with all 9th graders in their five participating school districts. This past year the most popular program among 9th grade students was Veterinary Tech. Shawn Eckenrode explained, “Each school district teaches their own Agriculture program. If ACTI would have the space, we could offer Ag related programs county wide to address the business’s needs. We could even have potential to look at adult technical education classes in the evenings.”

Adams County students and Adams County businesses are operating at a disadvantage with our limited Technical Education programs. Shawn is proud of the growth ACTI has seen since he has come to Adams County, but the potential for growth is exponential if the community and Agribusinesses support development of a larger technical school with Agriculture focused programs.



(Figure 5)

Without the local talent pipeline producing agricultural workers, many Adams County Fruit Growers have turned to the H2A program that provides workers for a set period of time. A grower in Northern Adams County said, “H2A is not perfect but it guarantees I have a workforce when I need it.” Another grower said. “Without the H2A program most of my fruit would rot because I can’t rely on people wanting to work.” Our survey results and interviews show that most growers in Adams County utilize the H2A program (Figure 6).



(Figure 6)

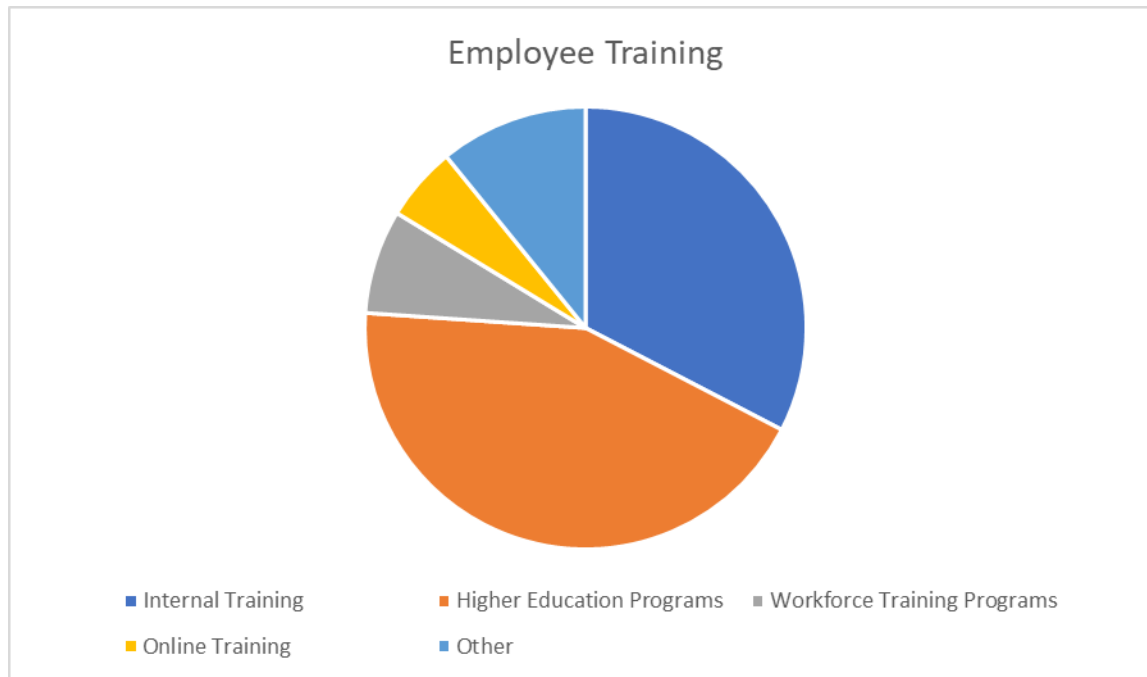
The H2A program is a viable solution for many of our fruit growers in Adams County to ensure an adequate supply of labor. However, the program presents many obstacles and is expensive and time consuming. A few of the larger fruit growing operations manage their own application processes, but a majority of your small to mid-size fruit growing operations contract out to an employment service agency to complete the cumbersome application. “We spend thousands and thousands of dollars on the H2A program, and it is a huge risk” said one fruit grower. Another fruit grower said, “We pay a lot of money to have them here and we are required to start paying them as soon as they arrive, even if the fruit is not ready to be picked.”

One fruit growing operation that has been in Adams County for generations noted, “We haven’t used the H2A program because we cannot meet the housing requirements of the program.” Another small fruit grower noted, “The cost and the regulations of the H2A program make the program difficult to use.” Fruit growers not using the H2A program all acknowledged they are strongly considering the H2A program because it has become more and more difficult to find workers each year. One farmer noted the limited supply of affordable housing in Adams County as a barrier.

The popularity of the H2A program has exploded over the past 20 years. In 2005 the H2A program had 48,000 positions certified to around 371,000 in fiscal year 2022. Around 300,000 visas were issued in fiscal 2022 by the Department of State (*USDA ERS - Farm Labor, 2023*). The H2A program allows contracts to last a maximum of 10 months with the average contract lasting just under 6 months a year (*USDA ERS - Farm Labor, 2023*). With the number of seasonal jobs and the increased popularity of the H2A program in Adams County, our project team needed to assess business owners’ willingness to invest in training for their workforce.

“Penn State Ag Extension Fruit Research Center provides all the trainings my team needs.”

Fruit Grower, Aspers PA



(Figure 7)

Our survey asked, “How do you invest in training your employees?” The responses were diverse and highlighted an asset for the Adams County community due to the variety of training programs and providers. Many agribusinesses invest in internal training while the most common training provider used was Higher Education Programs. The majority of Fruit Growers in Adams County are connected to Penn State Extension Fruit Research Education Center in Biglerville, PA. A food manufacturer located in New Oxford PA has also worked with Harrisburg Area Community College’s Gettysburg Campus to participate in apprenticeship programs.

Adams County also has a variety of training and education services offered by PA CareerLink, PathStone, Lincoln Intermediate Unit, and many nonprofit organizations. The PA CareerLink offers training and jobseeker services for youth, adult dislocated workers, and reentrants. PathStone offers training and career services to migrant farmworker populations and serves as an active partner in the PA CareerLink system. Lincoln Intermediate Unit #12 based in New Oxford PA offers Adult Education and ESL classes and serves as PA CareerLink Adams County’s WIOA Title II partner.

The number of services and service providers working to serve the Adams County Latino community is a wonderful community asset. However, our interviews, focus groups and community forum have identified barriers to reaching much of the Latino community. The key barriers to accessing and utilizing community services are as follows:

- Limited English Language Skills (Speaking, Reading, and Writing)

- Legal Immigration status
- Cultural Barriers/ operating in American social systems.

These barriers are complex and interconnected. Finding solutions will require resources and engagement from all community stakeholders.

Most of the farmworkers employed throughout the Adams County fruit belt come from Mexico and Central America. Spanish is the primary language spoken in Mexico and Central America. Penn State Ag Extension has started engaging the Latino community in Pennsylvania through the Latinx Agricultural Network (LAN) (Echevarría, n.d.). In the LAN strategic plan they identified, “Information is difficult to find in Spanish if needed, and they are unclear of the scope of services offered to them and which experts to contact with specific questions.”

To achieve this goal Penn State Ag Extension has expanded their training services to include trainings in Spanish at the Fruit Research Education Center in Biglerville PA. The trainings include tractor safety, electrical hazards, pruning of fruit trees, and spray application training. The list of courses available to the Tree Fruit industry of Adams County continues to expand. The Adams County Fruit Growers Association hosts a single day sprayer application training at Biglerville High School. Every fruit grower interviewed during this study used or was aware of the training provided through Penn State Ag Extension.

“The children get a great education here and are bilingual. They have so many career options that the farm isn’t attractive.”

Fruit Grower, Orrtanna PA On topic of retaining Latino youth in Agriculture.

Further communication barriers were identified when examining the different dialects of Spanish and the indigenous languages of Latin America. Fruit Growers in attendance at the Agribusiness Community Forum acknowledged the challenges of communication and that translation is not a quick fix. One fruit grower from the York Springs area said, “Translating a 40-page sprayer manual with technical language is just not feasible. Especially when the applicator license test is still only given in English.” Another large fruit grower said, “Translating to Spanish helps some people but many of my workers have a grade school education and cannot read or write Spanish.”

National data supports that educational attainment is low for many farm laborers with 45% lacking a high school diploma and 34% achieving high school diploma equivalent (*USDA ERS - Farm Labor, 2023*). The number of ESL classes and organizations offering these trainings continue to have relatively low participation rate. Many of the ESL classes are offered in the evening, a few nights a week. One grower said, “My workers are putting in 10 to 12 hours a day and then have families to take care of in the evening. Where will they get the time or energy to go to school?” A grower in Biglerville acknowledged, “Our workers are not going to leave their circle of trust and reach out to people they don’t know. That’s too much of a risk.” This was in reference to some of the workers’ immigration statuses.

Nationally, from 2018-2020 41% of farmworkers held no work authorization to be employed in the United States (*USDA ERS - Farm Labor, 2023*). It is unknown if the number of people not authorized to work is higher or lower in Adams County. It is, however, a barrier to seeking community resources and training. The Penn State LAN strategic plan identifies, “There is a culture of fear that discourages

Latinx communities from engaging with the broader PA community, including Penn State researchers and extension.” Overwhelmingly, Adams County agribusiness owners and managers expressed deep appreciation and caring for their employees. One large food processor in Gardners, PA, expressed, “We care about our Latino employees. We get to know them and their families. We see the challenges they face adjusting to life here and we want the best for them.” Another fruit grower said, “They become part of our families. Their kids go to school and play with my kids.”

A fruit grower commented how difficult it is to access resources without knowing English: “It is so hard for my workers living here to understand what is available to them. From enrolling your child in school, accessing health care, or even getting your drivers’ license. My team knows they can come to me, and I will help them anyway I can.” Services like CareerLink or Medicare that are connected to government funding are not resources available in other parts of the world. Another fruit grower said, “You must ask yourself; “Do they know about the service? Do they know how to access the resource? Are they comfortable enough to access the resource?” A participant at the Agribusiness community forum commented, “I wish I could have a single place to connect them with all the community resources available to them. Almost like a community resource guide.”

“I wish I could have a single place to connect them with all the community resources available to them. Almost like a community resource guide.” Participant at Agribusiness Community Forum.

Many of the Agribusiness employers noted that while English literacy was an issue in accessing community resources, computer literacy is another challenge to accessing resources. A Penn State Ag Extension worker noted, “Almost all the resources are online or operate through an app on your phone. Some school districts have transitioned to doing everything electronically. This is difficult for many in the Latino Community.” The Adams Economic Alliance survey asked, “What skills are most desired in your business or industry?” The top three desired skills identified by employers were English literacy, computer skills and good work ethic.

To further complicate the issues on computer literacy is broadband access in Adams County. Adams County has created a Broadband Taskforce and is currently completing a study to clearly identify underserved areas of the county. The fruit belt of Adams County is a known underserved area. This is the area of the county where a large percentage of our Latino community live and work. This is a component that needs to be considered when designing and delivering training targeted to our Latino community in Adams County. Access to broadband is an important component, but equally important is computer literacy skills to be able to effectively use the technology both professionally and personally for accessing resources.

“Farm owners are hesitant to support worker training if it takes workers away from the farm.”

Penn State LAN Strategic Plan

One fruit grower acknowledged, “Our business model is really a flat model. We only have three levels: labor, management and in some cases owner.” A second grower acknowledged, “I don’t think training my labor force would be very effective because of all the barriers. Where I want to invest in training is in my supervisors and managers. I believe cultural training at this level would go a long way to helping growers.” Another grower said, “If we train our labor force, we are training them out of agriculture and hurting business.” Penn State’s LAN strategic plan acknowledges this concern on a statewide level saying, “Farm owners are hesitant to support worker training if it takes workers away from the farm.” (Echevarría, n.d.). A concern was raised at the community forum saying, “It doesn’t make sense to target training for H2A workers because they are here temporarily.”

Two of Adams County’s largest food processors expressed a desire to have cultural training, HR training, and conflict resolution training. Both employers felt it was important to have these trainings in Spanish. The food processors interviewed also stressed the importance of computer skills as more tasks are automated. During a focus group an employee of a food processor said, “We have opportunities for upskilling and promotions that farm work does not have.” It should also be noted that almost all fruit growers use Penn State Ag Extension for training none of the food processors interviewed for this study used Penn State Ag Extension for training.

While many of the first-generation immigrants work as farm laborers or in the industry of Agriculture, many families remain in our community and look for careers in other industries. The Adams Economic Alliance recognizes that members of the Latino community participate in industries such as, construction, hospitality/ tourism, and manufacturing. It could be beneficial to the Adams County business community to ensure other industries have the training and resources to support the Latino community with opportunities for professional advancement.

ALLIANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Adams Economic Alliance recognizes this research project does not cover the full scope of Adams County agriculture industry. We are grateful to all the dedicated business owners, industry experts, and community organizations that contributed to this project. The following recommendations are not an exhaustive list, but a summary of common themes shared by our community throughout the project.

1. The Adams Economic Alliance recommends SCPa Works partner with Penn State Ag Extension to expand English and Spanish training offerings to tree fruit growers in Adams County.
2. The Adams Economic Alliance recommends leadership, cultural awareness and Spanish classes be offered to Agribusiness owners, supervisors, and managers.
3. The Adams Economic Alliance recommends the development of a Community Resources guide be produced in video format in both English and Spanish languages. The video resource guide will be a single resource for business owners to refer employees and support new immigrants in accessing community resources.
4. The Adams Economic Alliance recommends further investment in broadband expansion efforts to support Agribusinesses and their employees where they work and live. Computer Literacy courses and educational materials in English and Spanish should be developed to assist in a community digital equity effort targeting the Latino community and other traditionally underserved community groups.
5. The Adams Economic Alliance recommends support of Adams County Technical Institute's efforts to construct a larger facility with the capabilities of supporting county wide technical Ag education. Our recommendation includes further investment in Ag pre apprentice and apprenticeship programs, while also supporting efforts to engage youth in Agriculture through 4-H and FFA programming.
6. The Adams Economic Alliance recommends an Adams County chapter of Penn State's Latinx Agricultural Network be formed to further understand social issues facing the agricultural worker community of Adams County such as affordable housing, transportation, and economic development.
7. The Adams Economic Alliance recommends SCPa Works explore further engagement with food processors, manufacturers, hospitality/tourism and construction employers that employ many members of the Latino community. It could be beneficial to the Adams County business community to ensure other industries have the training and resources to support the Latino community with opportunities for professional advancement.

Appendix 1

Adams County Agribusiness Survey

The purpose of this project is to outline the needs of the various stakeholders within Adams County to provide a plan for youth training opportunities that can be developed for the agricultural migrant community. The project should take the needs of the business community, primarily to entities that are related to the agricultural community or that provide services to the agricultural community.

Question Title

* 1. Type of Agribusiness.

- Fruit Grower
- Vegetable Grower
- Food Processor
- Food Manufacturer
- Retailer

Question Title

* 2. How many employees does your business employ at peak season?

- 0-10
- 11-25
- 25-50
- 50-100
- 100 or more

Question Title

* 3. What is the average age of your current workforce?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

Question Title

* 4. On average, how long do your employees remain employed or return each year to work for your business?

- 0-6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1-5 Years
- 5-10 years

- 10 or more years

Question Title

* 5. Do you participate in the H2A program?

- Yes
- No

Question Title

* 6. How do you invest in training your employees?

- Internal Training Program
- Higher Education Programs
- Workforce Training Organizations (Manufacturers Association, Path Stones, PA CareerLink)
- Online Training Platforms
- Other (please specify)

Question Title

7. Have you had any positive or negative experiences with previous employee training programs?

Question Title

8. What positions are most difficult to fill in your business?

Question Title

9. What skills are most desired in your business or industry?

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Any questions regarding this report and its contents may be directed to the Adams Economic Alliance staff at 717-334-0042 or office@adamsalliance.org